

Book Reviews

Barnlitteraturens värden och värderingar [The values and evaluations of children's literature]. Eds Sara Kärrholm and Paul Tenngart. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2012. 346 pages.

In the past few years, the publishing house Studentlitteratur has released some of the most widely known theoretical works on children's literature in Sweden. Its most influential titles include Maria Nikolajeva's *Bilderbokens pusselbitar* [The jigsaw pieces of picture books] (2000), *Barnbokens byggklossar* [The building bricks of children's books] (2004), and Lena Kåreland's *Barnboken i samhället* [The children's book in society] (2009). Now, Studentlitteratur again positions itself in the vanguard of children's literature research by publishing *Barnlitteraturens värden och värderingar* [The values and evaluations of children's literature], a rich anthology on the values and evaluations of children's literature.

The volume collects a large number of well-written and well-founded articles covering the impact of ideological judgments on the way children's literature is valued and describing what kinds of attitudes towards society, culture, and humanity are being disseminated by children's books. In their introduction, editors Sara Kärrholm and Paul Tenngart question the binary nature of the opposition between didactics and aesthetics, two key issues in children's literature research. These do indeed run as a connecting thread through the anthology, part one of which is devoted to the values (*värden*) of children's literature.

The opening chapter is a compelling essay by Paul Tenngart on the role of children's literature in the psychological socialisation of young readers. He draws on cognitive theory to argue that reading prepares children to flexibly respond to problems, from which he draws the conclusion that children's books shape our society. Novelist Annika Widholm's starting point is the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child. She contends that awareness on the subject can more easily be raised through a narrative and also demonstrates children's book characters' potential to set an example in this matter. The potential contribution of the comic series *Illustrerade klassiker* [Classics illustrated] to child readers' literary socialisation as they step from comic to Literature (with

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a capital L) is discussed by Anders Mortensen. In two case studies, he illustrates the series' normative and didactic intentions.

The section on evaluations (*värderingar*) of children's literature starts with a chapter by Tuva Åkerström, who very explicitly deals with the overarching tension 'aesthetical/pedagogical'. She explains how these opposing bundles of norms (in the shape of either nostalgic views on childhood or adult predominance) influence the evaluation of children's literature. Astrid Lindgren is *incontournable* in the Swedish children's literary field and referred to in over half of the chapters in this volume. The set of norms guiding her activities as an editor at the publishing house Rabén & Sjögren is explored by Helene Ehriander. By analysing Lindgren's correspondence with author Eva Bergold in 1966, Ehriander reveals that Lindgren did not affiliate with the radical social ideals budding around that time. Sara Kärrholm's chapter deals with emerging views on ideology critique as mirrored in left-wing cultural magazine *Ord & Bild* [Word & image] in the 1970s. Back then, critics aimed at uncovering 'false' representations of 'reality' in children's books and solely valued mimetic literature.

An international perspective is adopted in part three. First, Lisa Källström investigates the idea of collective nostalgia as evidenced in conceptions of Sweden as a nation of idyllic 'noisy villages' in German popular culture. The examples she studies bear testimony to the contradictory attitudes held towards this fantasy. After Astrid Lindgren, Selma Lagerlöf is another canonical Swedish author whose work could not possibly be overlooked. Her *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (published in English as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*) was originally intended as a geographical handbook, but it unexpectedly transcended national boundaries. Anna Smedberg Bondesson demonstrates how Nils even speaks to Japanese, Italian, American, and German audiences. The fairly new branch of research of ecocriticism is represented by Margaretha Ullström's examination of the image of the wolf in children's books. She links the heightened respect for the animals in recent children's books to increased awareness of climate change.

Martin Hellström's analysis of the notion of friendship in Eva Lindström's oeuvre opens the section on picturebooks. He demonstrates that the author's use of a restricted first-person perspective, bordering on egocentrism, breaches the implicit norms of how to treat the concept of friendship. Next, Åsa Warnqvist draws an in-depth picture of Pija Lindenbaum as a 'norm critic', whose highly disruptive elements in her picturebooks challenge prevailing norms regarding family life, power, gender, and sexual inclination. Maria Ulfsgård discusses the suitability of a book from the popular series on Alfons Åberg dealing with war refugees. In a case study probing trainee teachers' response to *Alfons och soldatpappan* [Alfons and the soldier daddy], she uncovers unexpected prejudices and stereotypical depictions of gender and ethnicity.

In the contribution opening the next section, Anna Clara Törnqvist refutes the assumption that contemporary young-adult writers are free to discuss whatever topic they want. She observes that YA literature is still curtailed by several (mainly pedagogical) regulations, as is shown in her reception study

of Peter Pohl's controversial novel *Nu heter jag Nirak* [Now I'm called Nirak] (2007). Next, Bibi Jonsson addresses the implications of the portrayal of lesbian desire in typical girls' books from the 1950s and 1960s. Jonsson explains why she does not find the novels entirely groundbreaking, despite their breaching heteronormativity. In the last chapter on YA literature, Ann Steiner contradicts young girls' assumed open-mindedness as regards sexual matters by analysing the depiction of sexual desire in Katarina von Bredow's oeuvre. She finds that the girl characters are taught to control their sexuality while oscillating between (self-)images of madonnas or whores.

The final subdivision deals with children's film and TV. Tommy Gustafsson explores the tension between the 'good' transfer of historical knowledge and the 'bad' entertainment value in the 1970 TV series *Il était une fois l'homme* [Once upon a time ... man]. He concludes that it is appreciated for its pedagogical value despite the heavy censoring of historical facts in favour of creating tension and empathy. Lastly, Åsa Bergström and Anders Wilhelm Åberg thoroughly and convincingly scrutinise representations of ethnicity, class, and gender (the former two hardly touched upon elsewhere in the anthology) in three different film adaptations of one single manuscript from 1944, 1974, and 2006. They undercut the persistent idea of Swedish children's film as representing an Edenic 'Bullerbyttillvaro' [noisy village existence] by foregrounding the striking shifts in depiction of social conflicts and ethnic stereotypes in the three films. This contribution truly is a worthy conclusion to the volume.

As mentioned before, the pedagogic/literary-duality underpins the argumentation of several of the anthology's chapters. Gender issues, too, are high on the contributors' agenda, reflecting a general concern in Swedish society for *jämställdhet* or gender equality. Although these subjects are tackled from various angles, small hints of repetition and one-sidedness creep in throughout the book. Moreover, the title brings to mind the position of children's literature in the broader literary field, along with literary sociological questions, such as children's literary awards and criticism, which are not dealt with at all. The inclusion of a discussion of these issues might have further enriched this already valuable volume.

Sara Van den Bossche
Department of Literary Studies – Scandinavian Literatures
Ghent University, Belgium
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Subjectivity in Asian Children's Literature and Film: Global Theories and Implications. Ed. John Stephens. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. 232 pages.

This collection of essays will reach out to readers who are interested in the issue of subjectivity in children's literature, and will, if they are not familiar with subjectivity in the Asian context, open the door for discussion in this area. The first chapter, by the editor John Stephens, 'The Politics of Identity: A Transcultural Perspective on Subjectivity in Writing for Children', is a reliable